



USE A LENGTH OF MONO AS A LEADER

## Leader logic

STILL TYING ON A TAPERED LEADER? HERE'S WHY YOU DON'T NEED TO

**T**HERE MAY BE no more confusing and vexing element in all of fly fishing than leaders. Even worse, 90 per cent of everything you've ever been told about leaders is just plain wrong. Or more correctly, most leader lore is needlessly complicated and decades out of date. How do I know? Because almost 20 years ago, I threw away the leader rulebook, yet kept catching more and bigger fish.

Emerging from the Dark Ages of leader understanding has improved and simplified my fly fishing life more than anything else I have ever done. And it can do the same for you, too, if you follow me into the light. Here's how.

### LEADER LORE

A monofilament or fluorocarbon fly-fishing leader has two jobs: form a near-invisible connection between the fly line and fly, and smoothly transfer enough kinetic energy from the fly line so that it lands straight (in arcane fly lingo, that's called "turning over" the fly).

Early mono, from the 1950s, was very stiff, and the era's fibreglass rods were soft and underpowered. So, the only way to get a smooth transfer of energy from the fly line was with a tapered leader, made by tying together segments of successively lighter mono. For example, a 10-foot leader might start with a length of 20-pound test, roughly as thick as the fly line, followed by three, four or five lighter segments. The final piece, called the "tippet," would be sized to the fish (four-pound-test for stream trout, for example).

Knotted tapered leaders were—and still are—are a pain to tie, especially on the water. In addition, the knots pick up weeds and gunk in the water, and each knot introduces a potential failure point. So, when knotless tapered leaders appeared commercially in the 1980s, they quickly became the rage. I spent a small fortune on those \$10 tapered leaders before realizing they were a scam.

### TAPER TRAP

To be clear, a tapered leader—whether homemade or pur-



LEARN HOW TO FIX CASTING PROBLEMS AT [WWW.OUTDOORCANADA.CA/FLYCASTFIXES](http://WWW.OUTDOORCANADA.CA/FLYCASTFIXES).

chased—does the job. It connects your fly, and straightens out as it should. And every fly-fishing manual in the last 70 years says you need a tapered leader. But here's the thing: 90 per cent of the time, a straight piece of mono or fluoro fishing line does the job just as well. Why? Because modern mono is flexible enough to transfer energy without a taper, especially when combined with today's colossally improved lines and rods.

As fly-fishing gear has improved, however, it seems few anglers have bothered to question conventional leader wisdom. But I have. Since the early 2000s, I've been using simple one-piece mono leaders for almost all of my freshwater fly fishing. They cost about 20 cents each, and work perfectly. In fact, if you can't get a nine-foot mono leader to land straight, you don't have a leader problem—you've got a casting problem.

### SIMPLE SYSTEM

For floating lines, I just use a single seven- to 12-foot length of mono, selecting the line strength based on the size of the fly and the fish. For the vast majority of my trout fishing, with flies from size 14 up to size 8, I use six-pound mono. On windy days or when using bigger flies, you need a somewhat stiffer leader, so I'll go up to eight- or sometimes even 10-pound line. (With the heavier mono, I tie on my fly with a loop knot to ensure it has plenty of action.) I only deviate from this system on the rare occasion when I use a tiny size 16 or 18 fly. Then I'll add 18 inches of four-pound to the end, just so I can thread the line through the hook's minuscule eye.

I realize that bucking decades of conventional fly-fishing wisdom makes me sound like a member of the tinfoil-hat brigade. But if you don't believe me, try it yourself. Under identical conditions on the lawn or on the water, cast a tapered leader, then a straight one. Even better, conduct a blind test, with someone else rigging the rod so you don't know whether you're casting a straight or tapered leader. I'll bet you my best trout rod you won't be able to tell the difference—and that it will change your life. 🐟

ASSOCIATE EDITOR **SCOTT GARDNER**  
OFTEN BUCKS ANGLING TRADITIONS.